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Jean Calvin : les Hommes et les Choses de son Temps. Par E. DOUMERGUE, Professeur à la Faculté de Théologie de Montauban. Tome I., La Jeunesse de Calvin. (Lausanne : Georges Bridel et Cie. 1899. Pp. ix, 634.)

WHEN a biography is prepared, two conditions should be fulfilled, if we are to have a definitive work which will be considered an authority in the great trial in which writers undertake to bring to the bar of history those who have helped to make history. In the first place whoever the man may be whose life is under investigation, at least the greater part of the documents ought to be attainable by the reader ; and secondly, the investigation ought to be carried on in a country and at a time in which one can be free from prejudice of any sort, in order that the work may be done with the calm impartiality which lapse of time alone can bring.

The first of these conditions is undoubtedly realized in the case of Calvin. The fullest evidence that any biographer could desire is contained in the edition, now complete, of the *Opera Calvini* composed of nearly sixty volumes, more than ten of which contain letters, prolegomena and annals, and in the standard publication enriched with notes, references and appendices, *Correspondance des Réformateurs en pays de langue française*, which the late A.-L. Herminjard gathered and gave out as far back as 1545. Moreover the author of *Jean Calvin : les Hommes et les Choses de son Temps* is fully qualified to appreciate the usefulness of such material. Unfortunately it is impossible to take a view equally favorable of the second condition, the surroundings in which the biographer is placed in the preparation of his work. Intellectual France is to-day more than ever divided into two camps, if not by the very name of Calvin at least by the struggle against Rome ; and the splendid volume which I have undertaken to review for the readers of the AMERICAN HISTORICAL REVIEW and which is the work of one of the most eminent and popular of the French Protestants, Professor Doumergue of the theological faculty of Montauban had to be published not in Paris, the only center of the French book trade, but at Lausanne, in a country of refuge for Huguenots. Here is a characteristic fact which must not be lost sight of, if we wish to understand the book, and to judge it ourselves in all fairness.

M. Doumergue has entered upon his task with the noble ambition of giving us, not only the definitive biography of Calvin, but an exhaustive study of the men and institutions of Calvin's times. I must, with reference to this matter, quote his text *in extenso*, since this conception of his work, or rather the particular method of work which he has evolved from it, is the ground of the severest criticism so far made upon his book.

“ Un homme ne vit, de toute sa vie, par conséquent de sa vraie vie, que plongé dans son milieu social, comme le poisson ne vit que dans l'eau, et l'oiseau dans l'air. Or précisément mon but est de reconstituer la vie si ignorée, si méconnue, si dénaturée de Calvin, de ce Calvin qu'on déclare être une abstraction faite homme. Pour constater sa vie, pour la sentir dans son exacte réalité, en même temps que pour la comprendre et la juger dans sa vérité vraie, j'ai pensé qu'il fallait, autant que possible,

la vivre à mon tour, et essayer de la faire vivre à mes lecteurs, c'est-à-dire la replacer et nous replacer nous-mêmes dans son milieu, dans les milieux successifs où elle s'est formée et développée. Anciennes gravures, vieux plans, quartiers de villes, maisons encore debout depuis des siècles, portraits des hommes, amis ou ennemis, qu'il prit pour maîtres ou qu'il combattit avec ardeur, autographes où se révèlent tant de sentiments, vieux livres restés intacts depuis le jour où ils sont sortis de la rue St. Jacques ou de Genève, j'allais dire : air que respiraient les habitants de l'Université de Paris, ou les étudiants de Bourges, d'Orléans, tout cela fait un tout indivisible ; tout cela, ensemble et non séparé, constitue la vie des esprits, la vie des cœurs, presque des corps et des choses au temps de Calvin, la vie de Calvin." (p. viii.)

This plan is excellent, and no historian will object to it, provided it is carried out with Calvin-like sobriety in its development, with simple austerity of method. The vastness and the complexity of the subject make such qualities indispensable.

M. Doumergue divides his first volume into five books devoted respectively to the family, the years of study, the conversion, the journeys in France, and finally the flight of the future reformer of Geneva up to the time of the publication of the *Institutio Christiana* at Bâle in 1536. In the course of this biography, in obedience to the plan which he has marked out for himself, the writer describes in turn Noyon, Orléans, Bourges, Paris, Angoulême, Nérac, Poitiers, Bâle, with their institutions, their buildings, and their inhabitants as they appeared in the sixteenth century; all with a wealth of detail, with many references and illustrations denoting a vast erudition both of the scholar and the artist. The Professor of Montauban is quite as clever a writer as he is a speaker ; while he is an orator of first rank he also writes very well and his book, voluminous as it is, is one of those which we read without counting the passing hours.

Unfortunately Professor Doumergue is working in the midst of a struggle in which he is one of the most resolute champions and, under such circumstances, it may be expected that the orator will at times dominate the historian in his work as a biographer. Fluency is a desirable quality in an orator ; it is not always so in the writer of a biography. The desire of being absolutely complete, of utilizing all the results of his research often induces M. Doumergue to be, so to speak, too complete. His volume on Calvin's youth is naturally limited by the dates 1509 and 1536. His references, however, in their notices of men and occurrences, cover the history of nearly the whole of the sixteenth century, events being mentioned which took place even after the death of Calvin. For instance the chapter on Protestant Paris leads us to the massacre of St. Bartholomew and has as a sub-heading the dates 1509-1572. M. Rodolphe Reuss, a competent critic, called the author's attention to the fact, that if he wished to preserve in the rest of his work the proportions thus given to the beginning, he would require for the years of Calvin's creative activity, not four more volumes, as he expects, but about ten.¹

¹ "Une nouvelle biographie de Calvin," *Bulletin historique et littéraire de la Société de l'Histoire du Protestantisme français*, XLVIII, 541, et seq.

This superabundance of detail evidently threatens the artistic and literary balance of the whole. This defect is all the more serious because it is also of a scientific character. It obliges the author to describe too often in anticipation, and in some secondary parts of his work to accept facts and use terms which he will be forced to give up later, when, in pursuing the study of his main subject, he shall have reached that epoch which he has treated provisionally, so to speak, in reliance on secondary evidence, and when he shall have come to know more thoroughly the details of that particular period. More than one instance of such inaccuracy of detail might be given, to which this method of work exposes the author. The space at my disposal will allow me to cite only the following example. At the end of the interesting pages which he devotes to Mathurin Cordier, the Rollin of the sixteenth century, who was the revered master of Calvin and died a humble teacher of the fifth class in the college of Geneva, we read the following lines :

“ Il fit une dernière fois sa classe. Trois jours après, il plut à Dieu ‘de l’appeler de ce monde et l’alloger en repos qu’il a préparé à tous ses fidelles’ [Calvin had died scarcely four months before] et l’on écrivit sur les registres de la Vénérable Compagnie : ‘ Le Vendredi 28 Sept. 1564, mourut le bon homme Corderius, en grand âge, heureusement et ayant servi jusques à la fin, en sa vocation d’enseigner les enfants et conduire la jeunesse, en toute sincérité, simplicité et diligence, selon la mesure qu’il avait reçue du Seigneur.’ ” (p. 68.)

With the exception of the date “ 28 Sept.,” which is a misprint for “ 8 Sept.,” the text, copied from the archives of the *Compagnie des Pasteurs* by Bétant, is here given correctly, but the expression : “ on écrivit sur les registres de la Vénérable Compagnie ” is not correct, properly speaking. When he turns his attention more especially to Geneva and the year in which Calvin died, Professor Doumergue will be convinced that it is better not to mention, when speaking of that time, either *registres* or *Vénérable Compagnie*. One of the ministers—in 1564 it was Nicolas Colladon—used to jot down at random the events and discussions which he thought worthy of being remembered. These scattered notes were later gathered together, forming at first a kind of *livre de raison*, then much later a *registre* of proceedings. As to the title *Vénérable Compagnie*, it appears as such only in the seventeenth century.

Professor Doumergue refutes, one by one, all the inaccuracies and the slanders, great as well as small, which have passed current among some writers concerning the youth of his hero, and he has performed his work in such a way that henceforth only ignorance or unfairness can explain a repetition of them. On this subject, as on many others, he profits by the fine work of M. Abel Lefranc, the learned secretary of the Collège de France¹ ; one may add that he completes it. But he is not satisfied with that. M. Lefranc showed by excellent proof that Calvin’s character, at the time he considers him, is not at all such as people had believed. He reveals to us a Calvin altogether too much forgotten, who was affec-

¹ *La Jeunesse de Calvin*, Paris, 1888.

tionate, refined, beloved by everyone, sought after, and charming all who came in contact with him. M. Doumergue claims that this Calvin is not only the Calvin of twenty, but also, and without variation, the Calvin of mature years, and when M. Lefranc states that Calvin in 1532 allows himself to fall into a fit of ill humor, using the words "*s'aigrit*," the Professor of Montauban reproaches him for not having understood the "*susceptibilité affectueuse*" of such a character, for not having entirely freed himself from the prejudices of legend (p. 200).

To make Calvin better known—declares M. Doumergue at the end of his preface—will result in increasing, not only the respect but also the sympathy we must feel for a great man and a great believer. I fear that if he is bent upon putting the accent on "sympathy," the cause of truth which he wishes to help by his book will not allow him to accomplish his task. When he shall have travelled over the whole course of Calvin's happy years of youth and health and when he shall have recalled the gloomy and great epoch when a church and a republic were arising in the fiery furnace, forged, as Michelet says, on the rock of predestination, then he will find no longer on his way the smiling and beloved countenance. His hero will grow strangely. He will command, I am sure, universal respect, but the historians who have studied him most closely have not brought back from their study, a sympathetic feeling as far as his person is concerned. They could no longer feel his heart beat. M. Doumergue appeals from an almost unanimous judgment. Before deciding definitely, it is just to wait for his own account of facts, but we must wish in the interests of historical truth that he will pay more attention to investigating than to pleading the case.

In spite of the objections which the work provokes and of the criticisms that must be made, the latest biography of Calvin is certainly an epoch-making book. I have given only a poor idea of its contents; the appendices alone—fifteen learned studies devoted to the discussion of special questions, and of which I have not been able to speak—would deserve the whole space allotted to this article. One may say that this work is a treasury of scholarly interest which should be found on the shelves of every library; and a part of the honor of bringing out such a book must redound to the credit of the country where it was published and to the credit of the publishers, MM. Georges Bridel et Cie, who have made every sacrifice to make it a masterpiece of typographic art. All the capital letters of the headings of chapters are facsimile reproductions of those of Robert Estienne; another volume will reproduce the letters of Badius; a third, those of Gérard. The tail-pieces are formed from the typographic marks or emblems of the great Huguenot printers. In every respect this book is a monument. It will certainly produce other works; and if it raises contradiction now and then, any criticism must needs be full of respect for the sincere, painstaking, and powerful work of the author.

CHARLES BORGEAUD.